

**CHUKWUMA ANYANWU:
DRAMATIC REFLECTIONS ON THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY**

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ABSTRACT

Drama performs various roles in the society. One of such roles is the re-presentation of past events. These past events are historical antecedents which a given society is meant to be abreast of in order to cut a proper walking path for the future, either to avoid pitfalls of the past or uphold a certain standard. Likening drama to a mirror, this paper discussed the reflective nature of drama in the Nigerian society. Through the use of the literary method, Chukwuma Anyanwu's dramatic texts, *Stunted Growth*, *The Battle*, *Another Weekend*, *Gone!* and *Broken Image*, were analysed to ascertain how well the playwright was able to project the Nigerian society through these works. It was discovered that the plays were well crafted by the author and that they mirrored the Nigerian milieu. It was therefore concluded that members of the society, especially the political class, should learn from these plays and build a society that is devoid of intimidation, corruption, oppression of the masses and the mass media, in order for democracy to thrive.

KEYWORDS: Mirror, Drama, Chukwuma Anyanwu, Nigeria, Corruption, Oppression

INTRODUCTION

Drama, one of the three genres of literature, has been a potent form of anticipating perspectives and thoughts. It is no disclaiming that generally respected, honoured and most powerful works of literature the world over have been dramas. Reference could be made here to the Classical Greek tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides and later the emergence of the most celebrated dramatist, William Shakespeare of England, whose works have consistently been a reference point in all ages. Others who have had impact with this genre are Molière of France, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe of Germany, Henrik Ibsen of Norway, and August Strindberg of Sweden (Brockett, 1979). In Africa, the works of Nobel laureate and Africa's WS, Wole Soyinka, Efua Sutherland, Zulu Sofola, are also a pointers.

Drama performs vital role in the society. Aside from its therapeutic function, in any of its forms – tragedy or comedy, drama instructs, educates, informs as well as entertains (Okeke, 2011). These are often regarded as its primary functions. While there have been arguments as to the primary function of drama: to instruct or to entertain, this piece is not an argument for or against the above assertion, one can convincingly say that drama performs both functions simultaneously. Through performances, drama has therapeutically healed the sick in the society and the society itself. It has equally brought comfort to the high and low in the society. Knowledge is disseminated and acquired through dramas either in live performances (theatre) or quiet reading. No doubt, all

dramas are written to be performed; this is a unique feature.

The efficacy of this dramatic genre, in every society and epoch, cannot be underrated. Like every other literary genre, it is most potent in recording historical and present antecedents and preserving same for the future. In the light of this, drama has been described as “holding mirror to the society”. In the words of Eni and Otio, “with the aid of characterization aided by the visual effect before an audience [drama] becomes a mirror with which the society can now examine itself” (2013, pp. 223-224). Drama can tell us a lot about human nature, the ways humans lived and live in the world through the narratives of their life experiences, either positively or negatively. Thus, it exposes how a people have gone through the trials and tribulations of their lives individually and collectively. Cohen (1991, p. 220) believes that “the theatre brings the problem of the individual to the society” as well as that of the society to the individual. This can also be said of drama, for drama performed before an audience is theatre. In its reflective nature, drama gives one the knowledge about how societies lived during different historical times. This could be said of the historical genres. All through the ages of drama, playwrights have written great historical plays. William Shakespeare wrote a handful of history plays that cover the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. These plays include *King John*, *Richard II*, *Henry IV Parts I and II*, *Henry V*, *Henry VI Parts I, II and III*, *Richard III* and *Henry VIII*. These plays are dramatic reflections of five generations of Medieval power struggles. For the most part they depict the Hundred Years War with France, from Henry V to Joan of Arc, and the Wars of the Roses, between York and Lancaster. Bertolt Brecht’s dramas, though revolutionary, are also pointers.

In Africa, the drama genre has likewise been exploited by dramatists. The first generation of African elites, most of whom acquired western education overseas, deployed their works in x-raying the Colonial Masters and their obnoxious rule. A good number of their plays were an eye-opener to Africans. Apart from keeping records for the unborn generation, they were also cleverly constructed to instruct Africans to resist the white man’s rule while they clamour for freedom/independence. In East Africa, Ebrahim N. Hussein captures the Maji Maji uprising of July 1905-1907, which started in Kilwa in present day Tanzani, in *Kinjeketile*. Also, Ngugi wa Thiongo and M. G. Mugo’s *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* celebrates the Kenyan struggles for survival in East Africa. In South Africa, Athol Fugard’s *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, protested against the plight of the black workers, even though they were the majority. In West Africa, Ola Rotimi’s *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, whose historical setting is the Benin Kingdom in the late 19th century and Sam Ukala’s *Iredi War*, whose setting is the Agbor kingdom, in present day Delta State, deride the invasion and subsequent overthrow of both kingdoms by the Whiteman.

Indeed, drama is a mirror. It reveals the problems of the society to the society and equally gets the solution from the society. The dramatist, who is the master craftsman, only holds the mirror up before members of the society, which in turn, members of the society see themselves and respond to. The motive of the dramatist “is to teach through entertainment” (Anyanwu, 2018, pp 32-33). This purpose prompts the dramatist to present the ills in the society through his/her work for the people to see and learn from. The dramatist dares not openly pass judgment since he is “the judge, without the right to convict” (Anyanwu, 2018, p. 33), the people (the audience) do. This paper is, therefore, intended to deconstruct the dramas of Chukwuma Anyanwu and determine their relevance in the reflection of the Nigerian society.

THE DRAMATIST: CHUKWUMA ANYANMU

Chukwuma Boniface Anyanwu (better known with his publication insignia, Chukwuma Anyanwu), hails from Umuohiagu, Ngor-Okpala Local Government Area of Imo State in Eastern part of Nigeria. Born in the 60s, he started his educational career in the 70s where he attended the famous Umuohiagu Central School, Umuohiagu and proceeded to the prestigious Emmanuel College, Owerri, all in Imo State. Not done with his academic dream, he advanced further to attain a university degree in Theatre Arts/Communication and Language Arts from Nigeria's foremost university, University of Ibadan (UI), where he equally bagged his Master's degree. Not done with his academic pursuit, he proceeded to the Delta State University, Abraka, where he got his Ph.D. He is currently a senior lecturer in the Department of Theatre Arts, Delta State University, Abraka. He started his lecturing job in the same school in the department of Mass Communication where he lectured Media Arts and Film Studies.

Chukwuma Anyanwu is very versatile and creative. He is familiar with all the literary genres, prose, poetry and drama, and has equally done justice in that direction. His prose works include: *Evil Hold* (2010), *The Twins* (2011) and *Grandma's Folk Diary* (2019, a collection of short stories), while his collection of poems is encapsulated in *Heartbeats: Poems of Youthful Love and Innocence* (2010). His published plays, which have been performed and are still being performed in the university theatres, home and abroad, and which are the crux of this paper, include *The Battle* and *Stunted Growth* (2007), *Boundless Love* (2007), *The Testimony* (2009), *Another Weekend, Gone!* (2010), *The Brothers* and *A View from the Wings* (2015). Others are: *Three Draw Banker*, a radio drama (2017) and *Broken Image* (2018). Of these, four of his plays, *Stunted Growth* (2007), *The Battle* (2007), *Another Weekend, Gone!* (2010), and *Broken Image* (2018) will be discussed paying attention to thematic preoccupations.

Stunted Growth

Chukwuma Anyanwu's oldest and first published play is *Stunted Growth*; published in collaboration with Stephen Inegbe in 2007. *Stunted Growth* unfolds the story of Joylanders, a society that promotes mediocrity for want of money. The play centres on De Madame, a stack illiterate, elected to the post of a secretary to pilot the affairs of the Dollars' Club due to her monetary manipulation of the electioneering process. The emergence of De Madame becomes a surprise, even to her own husband, Chief James John Duke (JJD), who unequivocally states that her wife's "secretaryship" of Dollars' Club is an impossibility!

De Madame: I have been given the womandate to serve as the secretary of...

JJD: Impossible

De Madame: What is impossible?

JJD: You as secretary? (Shakes his head) Congratulations, [anyway] my dear...

De Madame: Money is the word! Let's go and celebrate my victory. (*Stunted Growth* pp. 26-27)

De Madame's reign as secretary, no doubt, brought the club to its knees. This scenario is a replica of the Nigerian society, where the most competent and popular candidate never wins

election, if he/she cannot back it up with “money power”! In actual fact, as far as Nigerian politics is concerned, you have the money, you get the position.

The vaulting greed for money also has its diverse consequence. To garner more wealth, De Madame deems it fit to invest the Club’s money with the “Believers’ Investment House”, a Ponzi scheme, ran by some self-proclaimed pastors. Not satisfied after the investment yields “nearly a point 5 million”, she still goes ahead to reinvest both capital and interest. The consequence becomes more devastating than expected as everything went down the drain. This is succinctly described in the following scene:

CHIEF JJD’S HOUSE. *A state of emergency. De madame has slumped on a sofa and is being revived by Madame Titi. Chief Dr. Loveall, apparently unconscious, is lying on the floor. Chief is pacing the floor worried.*

JJD : Ruined! Utterly routed, ruined! No, it can’t be true. It definitely can’t be true!
Titi : But Chief Amos couldn’t have been wrong!
Loveall : (*Recovering*) My money, my money, is it true? (*Titi runs to him and helps him to his feet*) (*Stunted Growth P. 49*).

Again, this scene captures and reflects the Nigerian society of the late 90s when ponzi schemes like *Paragon Investment, Gold Package Pay, IIFA*, (Investment Companies that double any amount of money invested within weeks of investment) were the order of the day. The end result was the exclamation of “is it true? Is that so? Are they really gone?” and so forth and so on.

Despite the fact that Anyanwu sounds a warning about the dubious nature of these Ponzis, most Nigerians still fell victim to this same crop of money doubling businessmen who resurfaced this late 20s in the guise of Mavrodi Mundail Moneybox (MMM) . Although, tomorrow has been the “best historian for today’s events”, members of the society have equally not taken this into cognizance and have likewise failed to learn from history and thus, history has continued to repeat itself. This goes contrary to the vision of the dramatist who projects history through drama so that the wrongs of the past could be corrected and the rights upheld for the betterment of the society.

Stunted Growth subtly discusses the plight of Nigerian graduates, who are dejected, rejected and frustrated as a result of unemployment/joblessness. It equally gives the assurance of hope for the Nigerian graduate. Wazobia, the all symbolic character in this piece, who was tossed out by his own uncle and wife as a result of his joblessness, but later got a mouth-watering job as a chief personnel officer, is an attestation. This rekindles the hope of the Nigerian graduate and the future of Nigeria.

Greed and betrayal are the major thematic preoccupations of *Stunted Growth*. The playwright projects that it is the quest for money that leads to the betrayal of the individual’s conscience which makes him/her to choose mediocrity over competence. Written in the satiric form, *Stunted Growth* lampoons the political class and their greedy economic scheming and political manipulations. Faintly too, the play also treats the theme of hope. Hope for the Nigerian youth who is left jobless after acquiring degree(s) from the university. This is espoused in the character of Onome, who got a job offer at the end of the play.

Stunted Growth is a one act play. Actions take place in four different locations, Chief JJD's, Sam Peter's, Chief Loveall's houses and in the street but they all dove-tail and the play runs in one breath, non-stop.

The Battle

The Battle tells the story of betrayal of trust between two friends. Kendo a trusted ally of Simon corners his girlfriend, impregnates her and comes back to Simon to borrow some money to terminate the pregnancy which eventually leads to her death. On getting to know, Simon embarks on a journey to avenge her death.

The subject matter of trust and betrayal is well highlighted in *The Battle*. This is common in our society; friends betray friends, business associates betray themselves, family members are not exempted. We no longer have confidants. Individuals, out of their inner intentions, device means to betray the trust bestowed on them, not minding the consequences thereof. Betrayal becomes so hurting when it is occasioned by a trusted ally or confidant. This leads to the tragic essence. For, it is no tragedy when a known enemy kills his/her rival, but it becomes tragic and tragedy when a friend assassinates his/her friend just to achieve a selfish purpose. It is this betrayal by a close associate that hurts the most. In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, the stab that killed Caesar was not of his enemies who want him dead at all cost, but the stab from Marcus Junius Brutus, his closest friend, which made him scream "Et tu Brute" (Even you, Brutus?).

Simon who so much trusted Kendo, his friend, never envisaged, in all his rational thinking, that he (Kendo) could turn round to impregnate his (Simon's) girlfriend, come back to him again to get some money to terminate the pregnancy in the bid to conceal his evil deed. In the words of Simon:

We left the normal stage long ago. The moment you took my fiancée to bed, you jettisoned our friendship. Even that, Kendo, may be pardonable. But that you borrowed my money, used it to commit abortion with my betrothed and consequently killed her, is another thing entirely... (*The Battle* pp.86-87).

This is a prevalent situation in our society and most common amongst the youths. Thus, the author did not mince words in condemning this anomaly. Then, a question is raised: if it were you, would you let your friend go, if he plays into your hands? The author interrogates further: would you ever forgive him? The answers to these are the crux of the play, *The Battle*. And this is forgiveness! Forgiveness is a virtue and a better weapon for sustainable peace and harmonious coexistence in the family unit and the society at large. Jane, Simon's later girlfriend, in her plea to Simon, swiftly relies on the maxim of "to err is human, to forgive divine". This no doubt, is the author's stand. According to his mouthpiece, the repentant prodigal, Kendo:

I know wounds heal, yet scars remain to remind us of them. I know it is difficult to grant forgiveness to another but try. By the love we have once shared, forgive, by the brotherliness we have once known,

pardon. I will not ask you to forget. The human mind is quite incapable of that. That is why we have God; to do for man what man cannot do for himself. Forgive! (*The Battle* p. 109).

Most problems in our society, country and world, today reoccur due to lack of forgiveness and vendetta. This is common amongst our political gladiators. The mirror has been tilted up by Anyanwu. It is then left for us to pardon and have peace or not to and be in troubled waters. *The Battle* is a one-act play. It runs in one breath, non-stop, even though the flashback technique was used.

Another Weekend, Gone!

Another Weekend, Gone! tells the story of James, a young journalist, who is hunted by the government for breaking a news story. He is arrested, charged and prosecuted for not using a pedestrian bridge and subsequently sentenced to jail without an opportunity for fair hearing. In prison, based on instruction, he is tossed amongst condemned criminals who eventually murder him in actualisation of the government's plan.

In *Another Weekend, Gone!*, the playwright chronicles Nigeria's post-colonial leadership, dominated by the military. The play reflects the brutal muffling of the media and media professionals who dared to speak against appalling government policies. Aside from the third tier of government, the media (print and electronic) are referred to as the fourth estate of government. They are also known as the watch-dog of the society. Thus, the media bring government problems and policies to the fore and that of the masses to government. When such government's policies are in tandem with the masses, they are generally accepted and if otherwise, they are rejected out rightly. It therefore behooves the media, being the watch dog of the society and the voice of the voiceless, to project this outright rejection for the government to consider and have a rethink. This is obtainable in a democratic society, where there exist freedom of speech and expression. In a military-led government, this freedom is absolutely restricted and if any journalist tries otherwise, he/she is blacklisted for punishment.

Such is the case in *Another Weekend Gone* where dissenting voices were silenced. We shall have a detailed analysis of this, but it is pertinent to look back at history so we can understand the present; for history holds the mirror to the future (Zheng and Tingjian, 2016).

Nigeria's democracy was shattered by the military in 1966 following a coup d'état which overthrew the then Prime Minister, Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi was made the Head of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria, but his rule was short-lived as he was overthrown and murdered. In July, 1966 General Yakubu Gowon mounted the throne of leadership and established the Supreme Military Council. Gowon held power until July 1975, when he was overthrown by Brigadier (later General) Murtala Mohammed in a bloodless coup. Months into his rule, precisely, in February 1976, Murtala Mohammed was assassinated but his second in command, Olusegun Obasanjo, who was spared, succeeded him as head of state. In 1979, Olusegun Obasanjo handed power to a democratically elected government, Shehu Shagari, ending the military regime and establishing a Nigerian Second Republic (Ademoyega 1981; Mainasara 1982)

Again, as recorded by Nzeribe (1985), in 1983, Major General Muhammadu Buhari, a military, overthrew Shehu Shagari and scuttled Nigeria's nascent democracy. In its place, he planted a new Supreme Military Council of Nigeria and became the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. Buhari ruled for two years, and was likewise overthrown in 1985 by General Ibrahim Babangida, who appointed himself with the position of President of the Armed Forces Ruling Council of Nigeria. Babangida ruled for eight years and temporarily handed power to the interim head of state Ernest Shonekan in 1993 in a move towards neo-democracy. However, two months later, Shonekan was overthrown by General Sani Abacha. Abacha ruled till he was taken away by the cold wings of death in 1998; a death that most Nigerians celebrated. General Abdulsalami Abubakar took over, ruled and handed over power to another democratically elected government, in the person of Olusegun Obasanjo, in 1999. Since then till date Nigeria has enjoyed uninterrupted democracy for twenty years.

A critical review of administration of three of the military leaders (1983-1985; 1985-1993 and 1993-1998) reveals that they were very allergic to criticism of their government by the media. Media houses that dared were shut down and journalists chased underground. Those caught were labeled, tried in kangaroo courts and executed. This history forms the foundation upon which *Another Weekend, Gone!* is written. Rule of law was supplanted and in its stead sprouted dictatorship. Journalists, in the likes of James, who wrote "unsavoury" story about the government, were caged in and craftily dealt with in a crooked court judgment without fair hearing and defence. The ensuing dialogue, in the trial of James, justifies this:

Kolade : Good! Aminu, what are the charges against this young man?
Aminu : Sah! There are three charges against him. The first, disobeying the laws of the land which is an offence of a general nature.

The second-

Kolade : Guilty or not guilty?
Ugojah : Guilty, my lord!
Onlooker : Are you the accused?
Kolade : Who is that intruder? Arrest him!
Ugojah : You, who said that?

Second

Onlooker : (*Points to a running figure.*) Must be him!

Third

Onlooker : Na him, officer, eh don run away!
Kolade : Aminu, carry on!
Aminu : The second count charge is an offence of a particular nature.
Kolade : Yes?
Aminu : Obstructing traffic by refusing to use the pedestrian bridge thereby endangering his life and the lives of law abiding citizens.

Kolade : Guilty or not guilty?
Ugojah : Guilty!
Kolade : And the third charge?

Aminu : Looking disrespectfully at an officer of the law when he was apprehended!
(*At this to the surprise of everybody, JAMES bursts into laughter.*)

Kolade : Add that to the charges!

Aminu : Yes Sah! What shall I call it, Sah?

Ugojah : Ridiculing the law of the land, Sah! It should be a two-count charge.
Ridiculing the law of the land and making fun of officers of the law!

Kolade : Guilty or not guilty

Ugojah : Guilty to both charges!

Kolade : Guilty on all five charges! Now the court wants to confer before judgment,
sorry, before giving its verdict....

By the powers invested on me as the Chairman of this Mobile Court, I hereby find you guilty on all charges! As to my sentence, because of your ignorance of the ways of the Military, even though you call yourself a journalist, you are hereby sentenced to three months imprisonment with hard labour, with an option of a fine to the tune of one thousand naira only, payable with immediate effect! Court! (*Another Weekend Gone*, Pp. 22-24).

Why did James, a renowned journalist, conscience of the society, go through this torture and eventual murder? Because, he simply broke a story about a military president and drug trafficking. This was of course, during the military administration between 1983-1998. But can we say otherwise of our present leadership in a democratic setting? The head of the current dispensation also headed the 1983-1985 government.

The present government has not allowed freedom of information to thrive. Journalists and media houses are still being haunted. Some time in January 2019, the regional office of the Daily Trust in Maiduguri, Borno State was invaded by soldiers and Regional Editor Uthman Abubakar and a reporter Ibrahim Sawab were whisked away to unknown destination (Nwezeh, K. and Olugbode, M., 2019). The offence? Yes, "Sunday lead story on the offensive by the military against Boko Haram." In such cases, when the matter is brought before a court and bail is granted, such journalist(s) is/are still held in custody in flagrant disobedience to the rule of law. The case of Omoyele Sowore of the *Sahara Reporters* easily comes to mind (Adebayo, 2019).

During the 2019 general elections, there were reports on how Journalists were barred from carrying out their statutory duty by the Nigerian security, the military, the police and the Department of State Services (DSS). Elegbede (2019) reports that some of the media personnel were even detained, harassed by security services or other armed individuals, denied access to report on polling stations, forced to delete photographs, and assaulted. He concludes that covering the elections was like going to fight a battle with the law enforcement agents. Yet, journalists were not deterred; they pushed on just to make sure there was balanced reportage of elections update. Why would there be such intimidation and "suffering for democracy if politics is such a demon?" Second prisoner opines that these activists, the journalists, the critics and every other person that stands for truth

...are fighting for the principles which democracy represents. For the rights of man and the society. For the man in you to stand up openly, publicly, and without fear or hindrance, buy and sell in the

open market of ideas. We are not fighting for the Western brand of democracy, good as it may be. Why? Because our democracy, whenever it comes must be dented by our colonial past, by our military mentality and finally by our indifference. For our society is dominated by a populace that has been fed with the corruption of little minds which justify and do not question the sources of their impoverishment.... (*Another Weekend, Gone!* P.43).

Despite this unwarranted intimidation from the government, the media have remained resolute to fighting a just cause of standing for and defending the truth, and have also pressed the truth on the government and the society. This has, in most cases, led to change of bad policies by the government and also made the masses to support good governance and good government policies. No doubt, the conscience of the society are the mass media.

Another Weekend, Gone! also, saliently, raises the issue of gender concerns and also probes into certain marital assumptions which negate the women folk. This is as portrayed in the person of Jane Marvel, a society lady, who delays in yielding to James' proposal for marriage. She equally denies James the opportunity of a conjugal bliss to concretise their relationship of over half a decade, although, she (Jane) was already approaching twenty-nine years of age and clamours for the marriage inwardly. This exposes a generation where a young lady of marriageable age is approached for marriage but declines same and prefers long-time dating. This has produced a large number of "unmarried, unwedded widows" in the society as seen in our discussed play.

The playwright is, therefore, of the opinion that opportunity should be grabbed and utilized whenever it rears itself to avoid a disastrous end; opportunity, they say, comes but once.

Broken Image

In *Broken Image*, the story of Obinna and Ngozi is told. Ngozi leaves her matrimonial home as a result of her distrust for her husband, Obinna, a theatre professional, whom she believes to have been flirting around with women of his profession and those of easy virtue. While she dares to absorb the rumours making the round that her husband is a womanizer, she also swallows the bait of Obinna having a "first wife". This misconception sets the stage for the brawling between Ngozi and Obinna on the one hand and the families of both, on the other. Ngozi later discovers the true meaning of "first wife" and the nature of her husband and his profession.

It is the many misconceptions about the life of the Theatre Artist that *Broken Image* represented. A theatre artist is, most times, misunderstood by his/her very immediate family in particular and the society in general. At various times and places, he/she is called all sorts of names, seen as inferior; a non-to-do person. This situation is presented before the society to decide through the mouth piece of Obinna, a theatre artist and Ngozi, his wife.

If the question of "who the theatre artist is" is poised before us, how would we respond? History, as recorded by Brockett (1974), has it that in the ancient Greek era, the theatre artist was seen as a nonentity, a vagabond, a clown/jester, a no-serious entity, and as such, actors of this period and their activities were, at a time, forbidden. In the Roman period, same treatment was

meted on the artist, not even the “clowns” that performed before the nobles in the palaces. In the medieval period, the theatre artist was seen as the most sinful sinner and his/her activities (dramatic performance) mainly sinful. Hence dramatic activities were forbidden and banned completely. In short, actors were forbidden the sacraments of the church, and religious authorities issued frequent injunctions both against presenting and attending any form of theatrical entertainment. Actors who dared to flout this order were equally executed, Brockett, 1974, p. 207). Thus, dramatic activity went underground. However, one unique thing about the theatre artist and his/her activities, all through the ages is that, the theatre lives on and never dies.

In our present society, the theatre artist is seen and regarded as being “good-for-nothings”, “social misfit and mad men”, “those people who make plays and jokes on television, Radio and such” (*Broken Image* p.20). This statement paints the artist as a non-serious person and outright clown. This misreading about the theatre artist is further elaborated in the ensuing dialogue:

- Chukwudi : You mean people who do *ICHEOKWU*
Ngozi : Yes
Chukwudi : And yet you expect him to be faithful to you? He is like a musician isn't he? (*She nods*) That concludes it. And you expect him to be faithful? *Mba nu, nwa m!*
- Ikenna : Your husband, you say, is a jester? You mean, he is one of these people whom you never know when they are serious or not? Sometimes, they don't make sense even to themselves? How then do you make out when he is speaking the truth or not?....
- Chukwudi : I say you have said it all! He belongs to this group of young men who do not know the season of wears nor greetings. More often than not, they speak to themselves...I say it is difficult to distinguish them from mad men most of the time...
- Ikenna : But that is the very mark of their profession! To falsify emotions! I tell you when these actors or jesters are at their most unserious that is when you see them looking very serious. And when they are serious, laughter overcomes them (*Broken Image* pp. 21-22).

ICHEOKWU, is an Igbo word used to describe a troublesome human being. A person who craves for trouble where there is none; a mad man who speaks to himself/herself, a jester and one whose emotions are not real and stable. The theatre artist is also seen by the society as an adulterer, a womaniser, a flirt and a cheat. The life the theatre artist lives on stage “is inconceivable for outsiders as lacking continuation off stage” (*Broken Image* p. 44). Hence, the life he/she lives on stage is used as judgmental paradigm. Every theatre artist in our society is seen as the Tonto Dikes, Tuface Idibias, Davidos (David Adeleke) P-squares (Peter and Paul Okoye), Don Jazzy (Michael Collins Ajereh), Genevieves (Genevieve Nnaji), just to mention a few, whose extramarital activities have been everyday lead stories in the media. The theatre artist is never looked at as the Pete Edochies, RMDs (Richard Mofe Damijo), Patience Ozokwu, Mercy Johnsons, Chewatala Agus, Sam Dedes, just to mention but six, who are married and equally leading an exemplary life

free from the intrusion of the media. The theatre (the profession itself) has been branded and given all sorts of names. According to Obinna:

She has been misused by those she is better than. Violated, defiled, raped, scorned and neglected....She is called a harlot by the men who patronize her. Called a whore by her playmates who knew of her chastity and even to her children she is of no good reputation....
(*Broken Image* p. 18).

As the theatre is given the traits above, the theatre professionals are also deemed of having same, hence, Obinna, who lives by the theatre, is accused of infidelity. Yes, it takes reasonable and cogent argument to purge the society of this misconception as we can glean from the character of the aforementioned entertainers.

While other fields of endeavours such as Medicine, Law, Pharmacy, History, Sociology, Business Administration, Accounting, Economics etc, are venerated and accorded respect, Theatre Arts is more or less relegated to the background and is treated otherwise. In the university, the department is referred to, by students of other departments, as “play play department.” During recruitment exercises, Theatre Arts, as a discipline, is most times, never included in the portal. It is often grouped as “others.” Mention can be made here of the 2019 Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation and Nigeria Custom Service recruitments.

The usefulness of the theatre artist in the society cannot be overemphasised. Based on the intensive training the theatre artist receives, he/she is fit in every facet of life. This can be attested to by the role they play in the entertainment, communication, banking and oil industries. Far from the various false impressions of the theatre and the theatre artist, the theatre is one place where the individual and society “feed their hearts and conscience”. It is where the mirror that reflects the life of the individual and that of the society is held so they can feed their hearts; while the theatre artist is a teacher, whose motive is to teach through entertainment. He/she is the “conscience, the judge without the right to convict” (*Broken Image* pp. 32-33). In the words of Eze, the theatre artists throw:

Open the case. Expose the evil and commend the good. We do not categorically say that something is evil or good. Rather we emphasize the effects of that evil or good. We punish the bad, reward the good without letting on that it is what we are doing. The audience has its own opinions of good and evil which may be opposed to ours. We do not therefore impose any judgment on them. Ours is the conscience that will prick them. We make them smile without grinning; tearful without crying. We try to put a wedge in their emotions because their tears, their laughter, anger, shame, mean everything to us.... Our goal is to make them see through their tears, shame, sorrow, joy. Then go home and reflect and act upon our advice. We are the mirror....

Ours is to call a fool a fool in a polite manner. To find a way to call a rogue a rogue without actually using the word ROGUE. (*Broken Image* p.32).

The theatre artist is very dedicated person to the theatre, his/her business. There is a saying amongst theatre artists that come what may, “the show must go on”. To the theatre artist, there is no “African time”. When the theatre beckons, the artist obeys, forsaking every other thing, even his wife! Thus, Obinna, metaphorically refers to the theatre, his profession, as his first wife. Uju, playing Obinna in a play-within-a-play, obliquely tells Ngozi of his relationship with his first wife: Uju:

.... I did not take you unawares, or did I? I told you everything about me and you made your choice. I also made my choice. Yes, I married my first wife long before I met you. And I will cut my tongue before I will forsake her! (*Broken Image* p.18).

The answer as to the reason the theatre artist is misinterpreted is given by one of the mouthpieces of the playwright, Kolaimi. In his words:

That they express themselves in so many ways, by the environment, by words, music, song, dance, riddles and jokes, by tears, laughter and so on (*Broken Image* p. 51).

He further adds that the artist’s message is encoded in all modes of communication in such a way that the receiver of the message interprets it differently.

Some will go home with the impression of the set; some with the costume, song dialogue or whatever made on them. At the end none will be wrong but few will be correct because they grasped the whole rather than a part of the message (*Broken Image* p. 52).

It is therefore, pertinent to state that while the image of the theatre artist has been battered and shattered through misconceptions, Anyanwu’s *Broken Image* is a well constructed piece in dousing these erroneous thinking by members of the society. Written in Two Experiences, the events in the play, both past and present, are technically woven and presented in the most simple form.

CONCLUSION

This paper discussed dramatic reflections of the Nigerian society through drama, using four of Chukwuma Anyanwu’s plays, *Stunted Growth*, *The Battle*, *Another Weekend Gone* and *Broken Image*. It was argued that these plays, like the mirror, reflected the Nigerian society for the present audience. This reflection, no doubt, was for the audience to see what had transpired in the past and learn from them. In short, Anyanwu’s plays are satirical statement on the Nigerian society. The plays are technically well structured and written in a simple language that can be understood by an average reader. While *Stunted Growth*, *The Battle* and *Another Weekend Gone* were written in the Aristotelian dogma of dramatic creation, *Broken Image* got crafted in the African story- telling

format, as espoused in “Folkism.” In truth, “the face sees not itself but by reflection”. Thus, Anyanwu, through his plays, has lifted up the mirror for our society to reflect on its past and create a clear path for a better future; a future that is devoid of intimidation, corruption, oppression of the masses and the mass media, in order for our democracy to thrive.

Note:

An abridged version of this paper, written by the author, was first published, in parts, as a newspaper article by *The Guardian* (Nigeria) on Sundays 23 June and 14 July, 2019. Available at <https://guardian.ng/art/chukwuma-anyanwu-and-the-dramatic-reflections-of-the-nigerian-experience/> and <https://guardian.ng/art/chukwuma-anyanwu-and-the-dramatic-reflections-of-the-nigerian-experience-part-2/>

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